

Background

Intensive mothering describes a parenting strategy that emphasizes mothers' significant investments of time, money, and emotional energy to support their children in the project of becoming their "best selves." To prevent mothers from prioritizing paid work over child-rearing, a new cultural norm of motherhood emerged to balance the demands of work and home life. This concept elevated the status of motherhood by emphasizing that only mothers could fulfill this role. This norm emerged in response to white married women's labor force entry in the 1970s and 1980s, but ignored that women of color and unmarried women had long been combining paid work and motherhood, often with support from spouses or extended kin. Today, as intensive mothering has taken root as a mothering standard, what does time use in child-focused activities look like for these women?



Where Does The Time Go?

Trends in Working Mothers' Time with Children, 1965-2019

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Approach

In order to gather our data, we used the ipums Time Use Survey data. For historical data, we used American Heritage Time Use Survey (ahtus) and for current data, we used the American Time Use Survey (atus). When creating our data sets, we would include certain variables, such as race, gender, employment status, and marital status. We would then use stata to edit our data and recode the survey answers to better fit our needs. Finally, we used R to bring our data into a more easily visualizable format with different varieties of graphs.

Research Questions

How has working mothers' time in child-focused activities changed over historical time, and does this look different for Black and unpartnered women compared to white, partnered women?

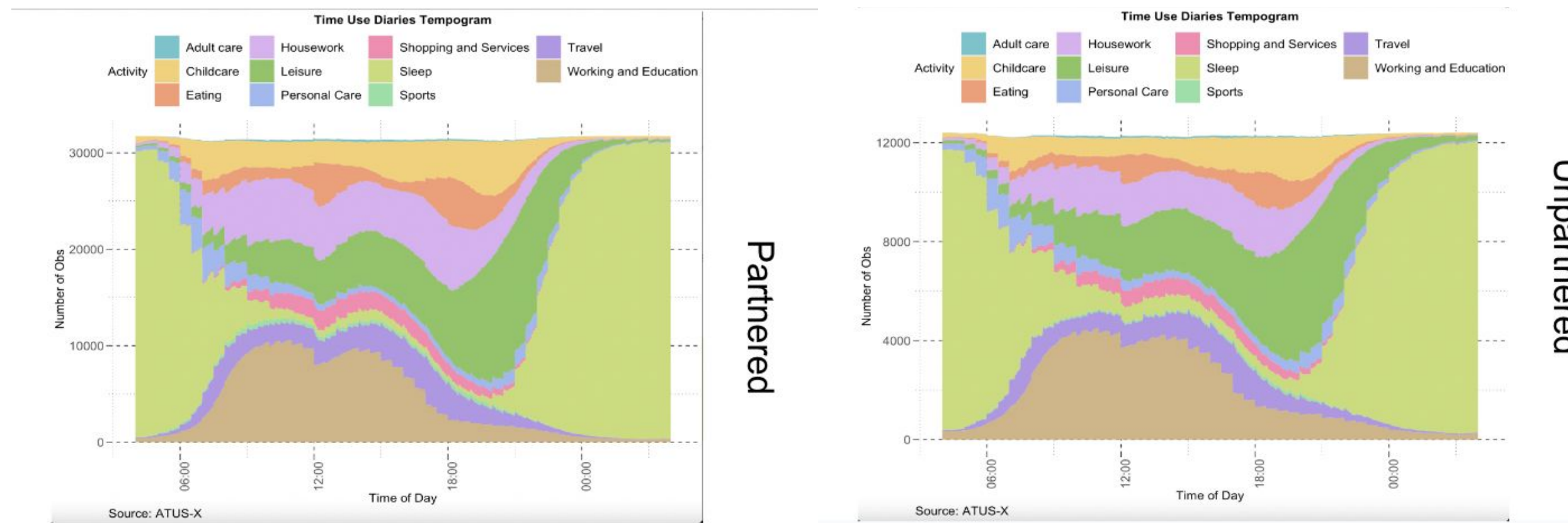
What does time in child-focused activities look like in a standard day for working mothers, and how does that differ by union status and race?

What explains differences in time spent in child-focused activities for Black and unpartnered mothers compared to white, partnered mothers?

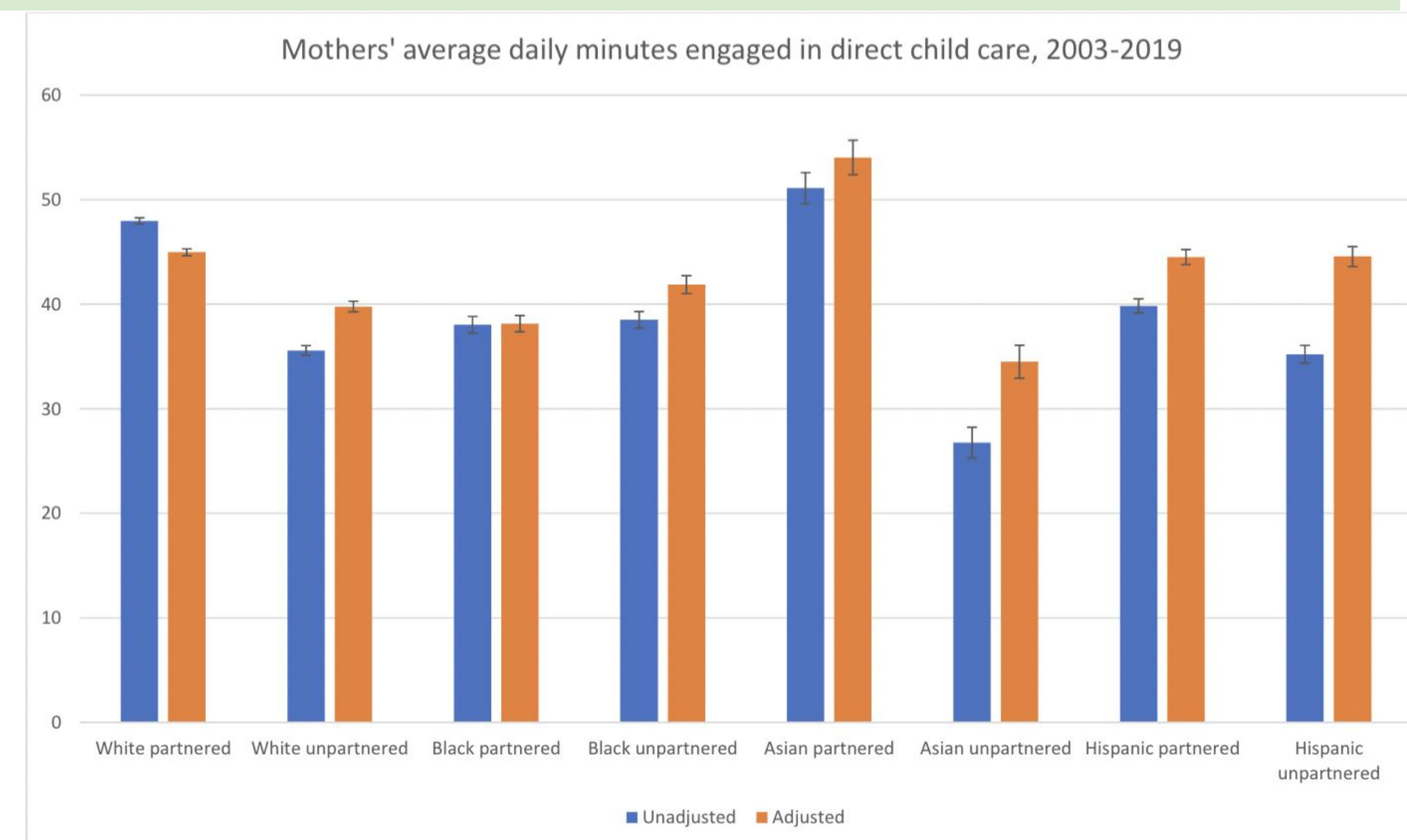
Data

The American Heritage Time Use Study data (AHTUS) is a collection of U.S. time diary data from 1930 to 2012 (with our analysis starting in 1965). For analysis on more recent years, we use the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) from 2003 to 2019. These data sets allow one to gain many samples of detailed data and to customize included variables. We filtered our data to include information on time use for working women (either full-time or part-time) whose civil status is known and who have at least one child in the household.

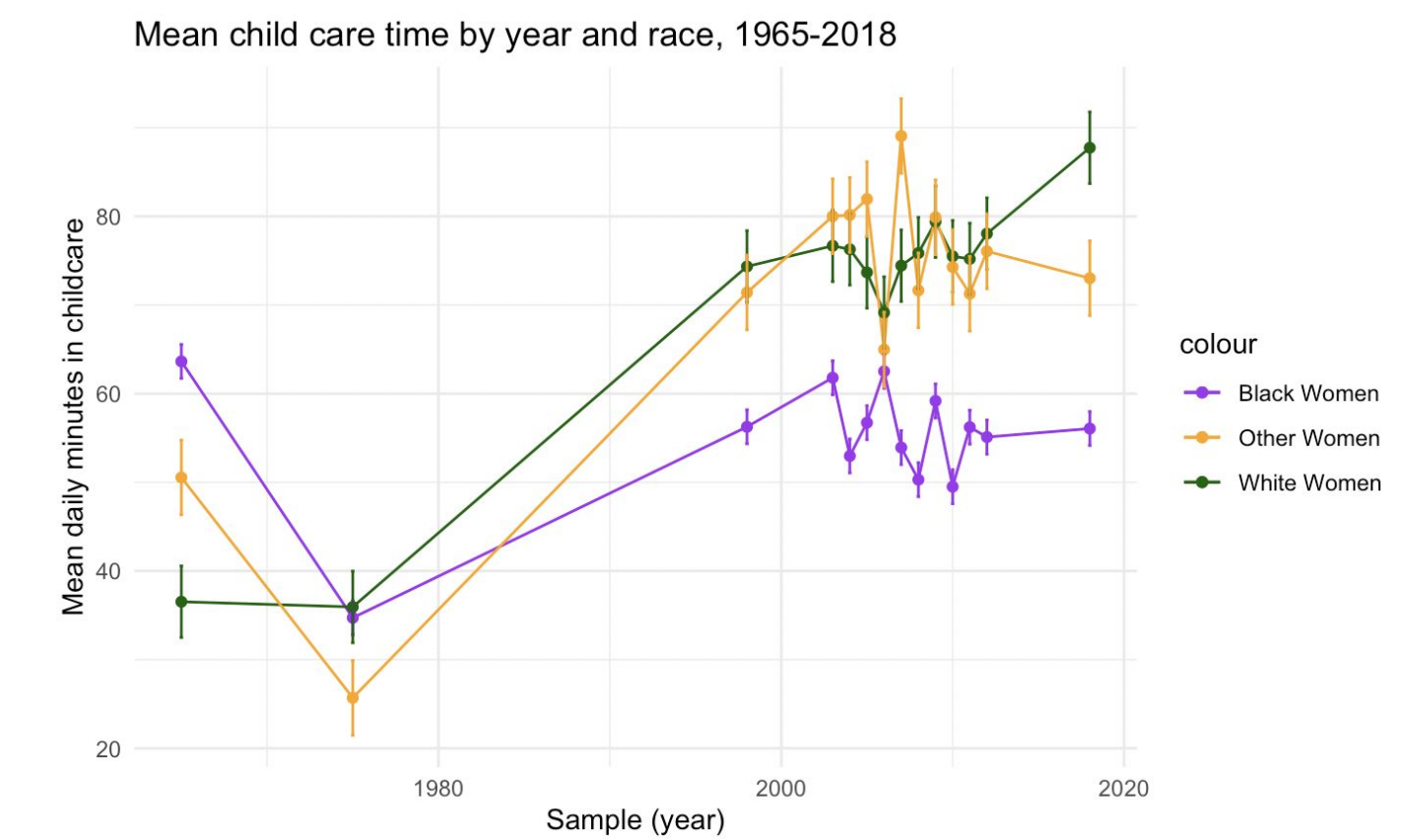
Results



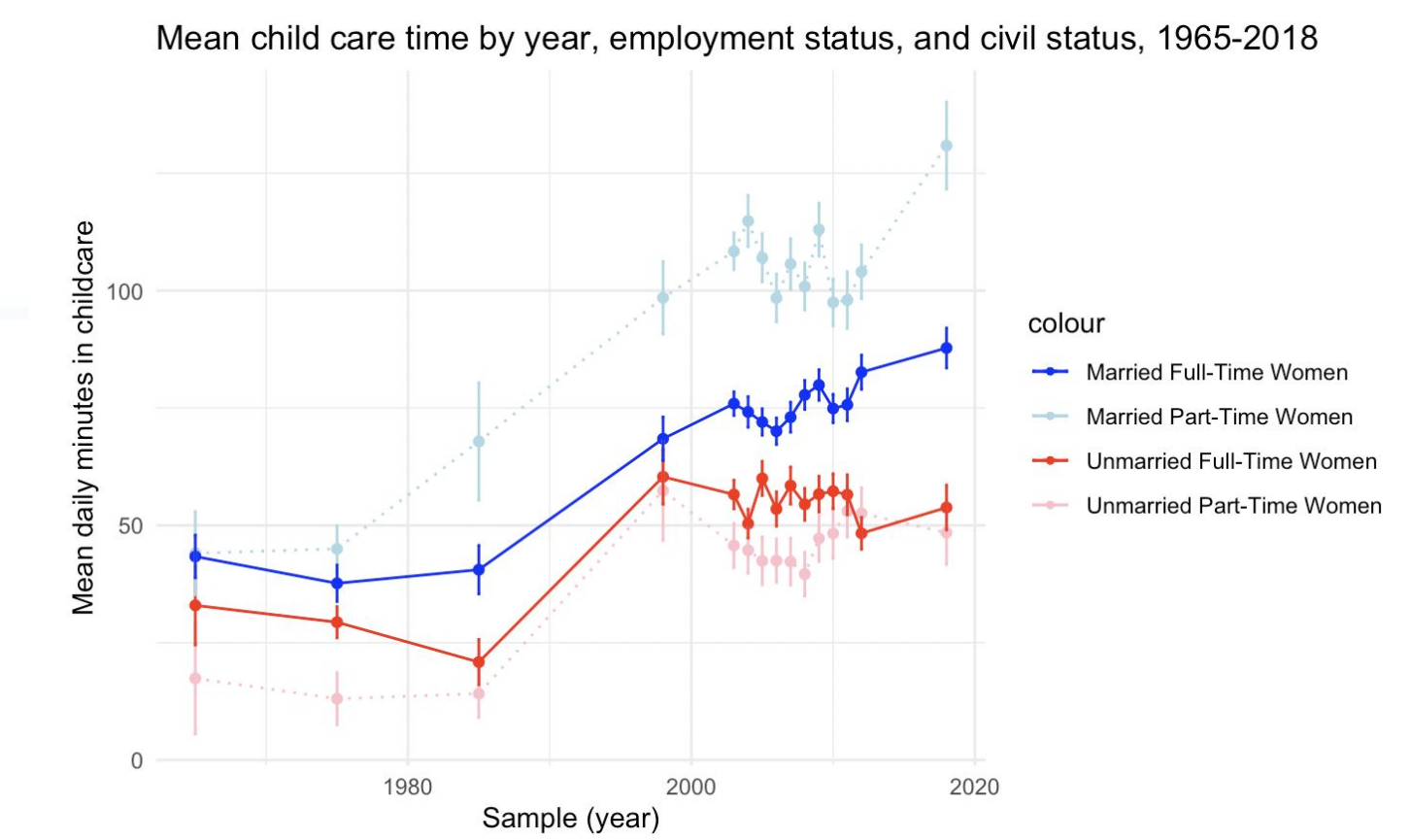
These tempograms, which use ATUS data between 2003 and 2019, highlight how working women allocate their time in different activities, including childcare, across the 24-hour period. Compared to unpartnered women, partnered working women spend significantly more time in childcare on any given day.



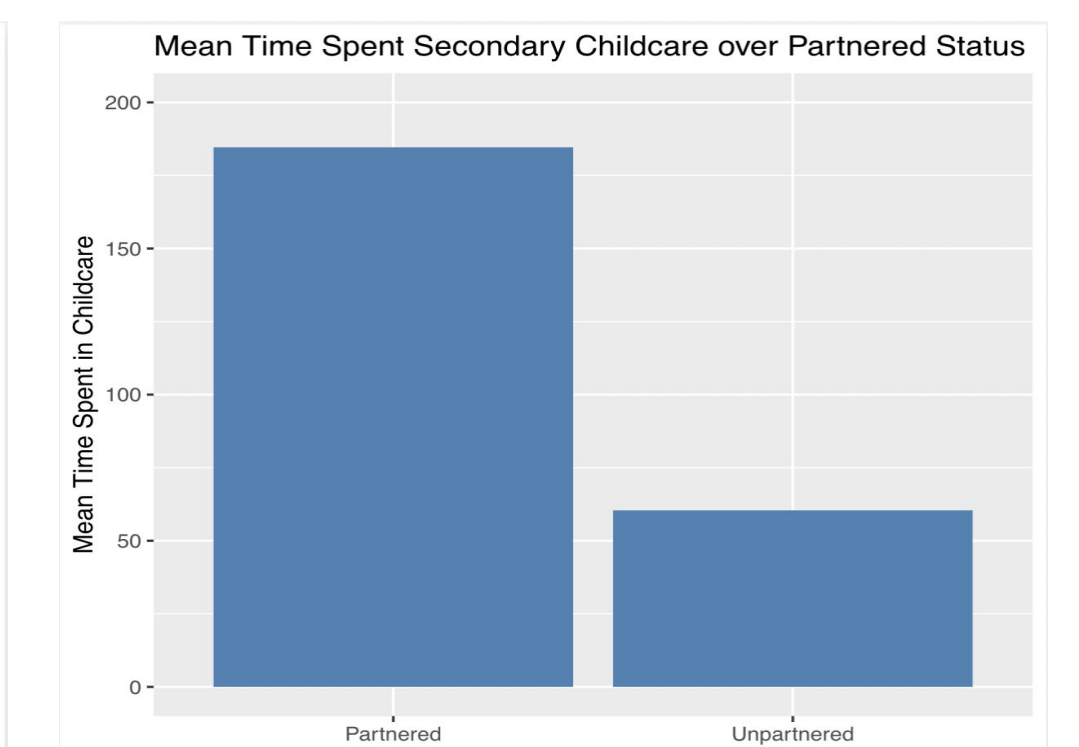
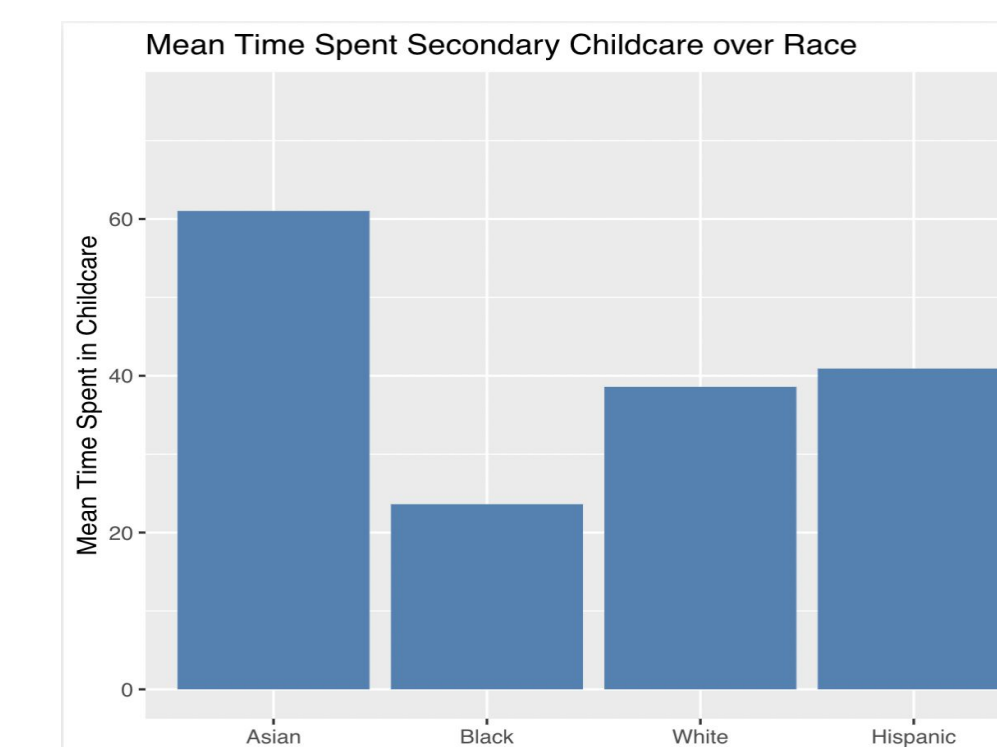
This bar graph shows the differences in average daily minutes spent in childcare for different mothers across race and marital status. The blue bars represent the average using the values we have directly from the data. The orange bars show predicted values after introducing statistical controls for demographic and economic characteristics.



The graph exhibits time spent in childcare by race between 1965 and 2018, highlighting that the gap in time spent in childcare between Black and white women has grown over time.



This graph considers the impact of employment status and civil status between 1965 and 2018, highlighting that time in childcare has increased since the 1970s and that marital status trumps employment status when it comes to time allocation.



These two bar graphs show group differences in time spent with children as a secondary activity while mothers are also engaged in a different primary activity. This offers a different perspective on how mothers use their time with children compared to the "direct child care" measures shown in other figures.